

PEOPLE & THINGS

RENOVATIONS to the Queen Mother's Caithness home, Barrogill Castle—or Castle of Mey, the attractive name which she prefers—may not be completed until next year, because of Her Majesty's insistence that the work must be done only when the workmen are not required for housing or other building schemes in the locality.

So far one wing has been renovated and is occupied by the caretaker and her husband. The turrets of the castle have been rebuilt for safety reasons, electric light has been installed, the windows enlarged and the grounds, now under two feet of snow, cleared of unwanted shrubberies.

The Queen Mother, who has already bought carpets, curtains and furniture, including local antiques, is expected to visit Mey this summer to supervise the interior decorating.

The Beaches of Mey

THE sixteenth-century castle stands above the stormy waters of the Pentland Firth and, although we are an island so far as I can discover (and excepting Osborne on the Solent), this appears to be the first time that one of our kings or queens has lived directly on the sea.

There is wonderful bathing from the beaches of Mey. If the Royal grandchildren are wise, they will indulge in the Victorian pastime of shell collecting, for apart from a fine range of more common shells, they will find countless specimens of *Trivia Monacha* and *Trivia Arctica*, delicate pink cowries about the size of their little finger-nails which are rare in Britain except at Plymouth and Caithness.

The sea fishing is excellent and the Duke of Edinburgh, who is now an accomplished underwater spear fisherman, will find the famous Caithness lobsters very worthwhile prey.

Mythology Dept.

WRITERS should not make a practice of throwing stones within the glass walls of their own columns but I think it very wrong that our most responsible newspapers should have misled us so widely about the "discovery" just before Christmas of a "6,500-year-old Pyramid, the most ancient stone-dressed building in the world" at Sakkhara, near Cairo.

The truth is that nothing of the sort has been "discovered." The foundation and enclosure wall now being excavated were listed more than 100 years ago among the ninety-six pyramids described in the classic "Archaeological Survey of Egypt" published in 1846. Digging on this site has been going on for the past two years and eighteen months ago the local press published photographs almost identical with those which made such a splash in our newspapers before Christmas.

A leading Cairo Egyptologist estimates the age of the pyramid at about 4,500 years, a trifling divergence, amounting only to the span of the Christian era, from the headline figure. The discovery of an avenue of sphinxes at Luxor has, of course, no connection with the excavations 300 miles north at Sakkhara and was anyway made before 1850.

Professor W. B. Emery of London University, the famous Egyptologist, is now at Sakkhara and I hope the Cairo reporter who started this down (or huske) of

hares, and the foreign correspondents who followed them, will ask him to help get them back into the right traps.

Austrian Charm

EVERY year the Austrian State Mint strikes two souvenir coins which are bought by thousands of Austrians as "lucky charms" for themselves and their friends. The design is changed for each New Year. The pleasant custom was started in 1933 and was not interrupted by the war.

This year, the Sun is the reigning heavenly body, and



the two coins both display it. The smaller coin, 23 mm. in diameter, shows the Sun and signs of the Zodiac on one side and on the other a lucky pig carrying a four-leaf clover in his maw, and the inscription: "I bring you luck in the New Year—1954." (Is. 8jd. in silver, 2d. in aluminium.) The larger piece, 40 mm. across, shows four female figures representing the Seasons, with the inscription "The Sun—Ruler of the Year," and on the reverse a calendar of Sundays and feast days. (Is. 1d. in silver, 2s 7d. in bronze.)

The Royal Mint say, rather stuffily, that they have never contemplated minting coins with lucky pigs on them.

Pearl Culture

THE most hideous statue in the world has just been unveiled at Toba in Japan. It is a twelve-ft. high £10,000 bronze effigy of Kokichi Mikimoto, the Japanese Pearl King, a stern, heavily-moustached tycoon aged ninety-five who is shown wearing a Japanese kimono surmounted by a bowler hat.

This ghastly memorial to the man who, in 1890, found out how to torture oysters into making pearls, broods from an acre among the pine trees over the blue waters which cover the world's greatest pearl-cultivation grounds. I am glad to say that Mikimoto is so incensed with the whole project that he has sworn never to inspect the monstrosity.

A Small Tragedy

"THIS is to advise you that within forty-eight hours charges involving immorality will be lodged against you. This notice does not abrogate your right to resign immediately or to reply to the charges."

Mrs. C., a £2,000-a-year language specialist in the State Department, was one of the many American civil servants who found this notice

on their desks one day last year. She had met Mr. C. about ten years before while he was obtaining a divorce from his first wife. When the decree was made absolute they were married. Less than nine months later a son was born to them. This was the "immorality" which, in the eyes of the purgers, might make her subject to blackmail. For the sake of her husband and her child, Mrs. C. decided not to fight. Now, labelled a "security risk," she considers herself lucky to be earning £13 a week in a store—just one small witch effectively hunted.

Pay As You Look

FOR the past month a "Pay-as-you-Look" television station in Palm Springs has been serving Californian viewers. The telemeter is a six-inch-high slot-machine taking coins which "unscramble" the programme. It also contains a magnetic tape on which the viewer can register "yes" or "no" by pressing a button. Immediate reactions to programmes can thus be obtained, straight political issues can be solved and simplified football pools could be run. In America, use of the system for home study is being promoted with the student finally taking examinations on televised questions requiring a plain "yes" or "no," a method of examination very common in the States. The student posts his magnetic tape to his teacher and he (or his erudite father) is marked accordingly.

What Happened to . . . ?

"WAS Sherpa Tenzing finally allowed to accept his George Medal? What's happened about the colicanth? Did Professor Piccard discover anything in his bathyscape? Is the Marquis de Cuevas going ahead with his libel action against the "Osservatore Romano"? What's happened to the American, Colonel Amoss, who 'found' Beria in South America? Christine Jorgensen? The Russian expedition to Everest? At the end of each year the average newspaper reader is left holding the rag-ends of a lot of stories that seem to need tidying up.

For me, the most memorable unfinished story was the Tongay case in early May—the death, covered with bruises, of five-year-old Kathy Tongay, whose father, Russell Tongay, taught Bubba and Kathy to swim five miles when they were two years old and, when they were five and four, was prevented by England and France from seeing if they could swim the Channel. Well, I have tracked that dreadful story down. Tongay, charged with second-degree murder, comes before the Miami Court on January 20.

Nature Note

BAD pheasant shoots would be tolerable only if the birds could be persuaded to carry small bombs in their talons and be trained to drop them on the guns. In fact, I would like all semi-lame fauna to develop some offensive mechanism, not because I am anti-blood-sports, but because the odds on the hunter have altered too much in his favour since our ancestors used to hunt sabre-toothed tigers through the Home Counties with bows and arrows.

A baboon in the Mikushi forests of Northern Rhodesia has just shown the way. When a native hunter called Kasenga aimed his gun at him he jumped down from his tree, overpowered the man, took his gun away from him and, using his tail to pull the trigger, shot Kasenga through the thigh and made off.